

7. THE HOUBARA BUSTARD *CHLAMYDOTIS UNDULATA* (JACQUIN) IN KASHMIR

Three weeks ago a local Shikari came to me with a male Houbara Bustard. This is the first time that I have ever heard of one having come into Kashmir.

The Bustard was shot in an area called Hajjan which is 20 miles north-west of Srinagar. This area is mainly paddy growing land and also maize depending on the water conditions for growing paddy in a particular year. In between this area there are bits of land which are kept for grazing village cattle and have numerous small mounds. In these areas there is a particular grass known in Kashmir by the name 'Krishim' which the cattle or sheep do not eat in the summer when it is green. The villagers harvest it in early November when it is dry and use it for feeding sheep. Normally in areas like this there is an abundance of grasshoppers.

We had a few days of very cloudy weather and a light snowfall in the higher mountains which, I think, was the reason for this Bustard straying off its normal migration route.

NEDOU'S HOTEL,
KASHMIR,
November 19, 1971.

COL. HARRY NEDOU

8. EXTENSION OF BREEDING RANGE AND OTHER NOTES ON BLACKSHAFTED LITTLE TERN (*STERNA* *ALBIFRONS SAUNDERSI* HUME)

While on a study tour under Project 453, W.W.F. of the Great Indian Bustard [*Choriotis nigriceps* (Vigors)] at Mithapur, Okhamandal, Jamnagar District, Gujarat (14-16 June, 1971), I visited the salt marshes near Okhamandi at the neck of the Okhamandal peninsula. Here, on the semi-dry mud flats, I found two nests of the Blackshafted Little Tern (*Sterna albifrons saundersi* Hume) about 40 metres apart from each other, with one egg in each. Both were in shallow cattle hoof-prints, one lined with tiny shells and the other not. The eggs differed from those which I have seen of nominate *albifrons* in Saurashtra, being less marked, lighter buff or biscuit-brown, with small black spots, and one egg had two small spots of Indian red colour; I agree with Stuart Baker (NIDIFICATION 4: 382) that the eggs of *saundersi* are distinct from those of *albifrons*—incidentally, Stuart Baker recognised *saundersi* as a full species.

Two breeding birds were obtained and their subspecific identification has been confirmed by Mr. Humayun Abdulali extending the breeding range of this subspecies which has so far only been known to nest around Karachi.

It appeared to me that there was no regular colony as in nominate *albifrons*. The nests were relatively far from each other, and not near water; some saltwater pools were about half a mile away and the open sea about one-and-a-half miles or more. The birds were comparatively silent and did not call out vociferously and become agitated as do *albifrons* when disturbed at the nest (could this have been due to incomplete clutches?). The tail appeared more forked and when settled on ground the white patch on the forehead is more prominent, the line between the black and the white being straight while in *albifrons* the black tapers to a point in front. Moreover, the legs of *saundersi* are olive yellow with black, while those of *albifrons* are fleshy pink to orange-red or yellow. The lighter coloration in plumage of *saundersi* is difficult to recognise in the field. However, the blackish tip to the bill seemed more extensive but this has to be confirmed from skins.

Saundersi has been obtained in the Gulf of Kutch (Abdulali, *JBNHS* 59: 657) and I have found nominate *albifrons* nesting in Bhavnagar. It would appear from the records available that *saundersi* is ordinarily found on saltwater and also nests in saline areas. I am fairly confident however that I have found what I believe was *albifrons* nesting close to both fresh and salt water. Nominate *albifrons* has a yellow bill with a small black tip. The lower mandible of *saundersi* also has a more prominent kink on the under-surface which is sometimes fairly visible.

In a recent letter addressed to me Mr. Abdulali writes :

‘In view of your remarks, I have had another look at all the specimens available in the Bombay collection and can confirm the difference in the size of the black tip and shape of the bill mentioned by you. However, we have a specimen, collected by Ticehurst in Karachi and marked *saundersi* by him, in which the shaft of the first primary is not quite black. Similarly, there are other specimens in which the black and white on the forehead agrees with that of *saundersi* but the primary shafts are not all-black. Actually in the Catalogue of the Birds in the Collection of the Bombay Natural History Society, I have listed 4 birds from Rewas, Dharamtar Creek, Kolaba District (near Bombay), under *albifrons* which are presumably the specimens referred to as *saundersi* in *INDIAN HANDBOOK* (3: 65). There would appear to be evidence that there is some inter-grading between *albifrons* and *saundersi* as would be expected, unless they are distinct species.

Or the differences may be due to age or season. The breeding colonies in Sind and Gujarat still provide interesting fields of study'.

DIL BAHAR,
BHAVNAGAR-2,
September 6, 1971.

R. S. DHARMAKUMARSINHJI

9. SOME BIRD NOTES BY W. F. SINCLAIR

W. F. Sinclair, C.S., one of the earliest members of the Society, was a prolific contributor to the first 13 volumes of the Journal on subjects ranging from *Nux Vomica* and Fertilisation of Vanilla Flowers by Bees, to A Stranded Dolphin, Snipe sitting in the open, and on the Indian Breeds of Dogs. A vote of condolence on Mr. Sinclair's death at a meeting of the Society held on 10 July 1900, proposed by E. H. Aitken (Eha), reads in part: 'And while his fertile pen enriched our Journal, his liberality enriched our library, and his industry our collections. When he was at Alibag (Kolaba, Maharashtra), the constant stream of specimens which flowed in from Mr. Sinclair was almost an embarrassment to even our indefatigable Secretary (H. M. Phipson). Skins, eggs, bones, shells and great jars of 'mixed pickles' kept coming in faster than they could be examined and put in their places. And the list would be long of the books and journals which he gave to our library.

An interleaved copy of Jerdon's BIRDS OF INDIA in the Society's library originally belonged to Mr. Sinclair. Some of the hand-written notes in it, which appear to be worth drawing attention to, are reproduced below. The scientific names are converted to those in current use:—

p. 8. **King Vulture** *Torgos calvus*. In Marathi, *Rajgid* or King of Vultures, is the Adjutant Stork to whom alone the present bird gives way. [The King Vulture has long been said to have precedence over the other vultures at a carcass, but several observers have recorded the incorrectness of this belief. The Adjutant Stork is now rare all over the country, but this appears to be a plausible explanation and another instance of a misapplication of a vernacular name—H.A.]

p. 72. **Crested Hawk Eagle** *Spizaetus cirrhatus*. The cry is a sharp note twice or thrice repeated 'kwee-kwee' (crescendo). It is not uttered on the wing, but it will sit on trees and scream at intervals for half-an-hour. It is essentially a forest bird and goes through trees and bush like a Sparrow Hawk, very bold and fierce, and raids on its